

— All Hands on Deck — The Adopt-A-Ship Program NEEDS You!

By Alex Landsburg, Coordinator of Research and Development

The "Adopt A Ship" Program provides the opportunity for a fifth- through eighth-grade classroom to establish ties with a ship of the American Merchant Marine and exchange correspondence with the crewmembers. Since the late 1990's, the Maritime Administration (MARAD), through a joint effort with the Propeller Club of the United States (Propeller Club), has been helping with the administrative efforts for this program. The Adopt-A-Ship Program is an effective way to educate children, parents, and teachers about the maritime industry. It also has a GREAT ability to inspire our youth to learn and become more aware on a personal basis of so many exciting things that are happening around them. This truly invaluable program needs your help in involving more volunteer ships and teachers to really make a difference!

The original purpose of the program was to inform young Americans about the maritime industry and the need for an educated American Merchant Marine, embracing not only the fleet of ocean and coastal vessels, but also those on navigable rivers, lakes, bays, and sounds, as well as harbor craft. While using the marine industry as a focus, the program is excellent in fostering interests in geography, history, transportation (foreign and domestic trade), science, math, and English.

In essence, an adopted ship offers the classroom teacher a wonderful tool with which to engage and interest students. Almost as an aside, the program provides to the students, their parents, and the teacher an understanding of the maritime industry, its importance, and possible careers that might be pursued. The experience of communicating with the ship is able to excite youth about what is being taught and inspires them through a more personal connection to their studies, which can often appear to be highly abstract and not part of real life.

The program is essentially a pen pal relationship between the students and those aboard the ship and not really difficult to support. Once a month, the class writes to the master of the ship, and once a month the master responds with answers and discusses where the ship is currently located and shares common shipboard experiences with the class. When a class letter pertains to a particular shipboard department, it is generally answered by those in charge of the department. However, all correspondence from the ship is usually supervised and signed by the captain and sent to the class in care of the teacher responsible for the school project. The adoption and its communications essentially enable bringing real ongoing activities into classroom discussions of various curriculum studies.

MARAD and the Propeller Club are very concerned with having a continuing supply of inspired and well-educated maritime professionals. There is the opportunity for engaging many more teachers to volunteer their classes to adopt ships and the need for many more ship operators and mariners to volunteer their ships for adoption. The time is now to make everyone aware of this great program and expand its effectiveness!

MARAD employees and others in the industry harbor a vast wealth of maritime experiences with which to inspire and educate our youth of today. American school children are not familiar with career opportunities in the American Merchant Marine and related industries. Spending some time to visit a classroom that has adopted a ship can really contribute to this experience and help the teacher truly bring the youth alive to learning and the exciting things that happen in our industry. A transportation example with all of the ingredients of time, distance, speed, geography, and communications when taken into a classroom with a real person and with connections to actual mariners and their ships can really make the classroom experiences even more relevant!

Please spread the word about this great program by talking with friends and acquaintances about how invaluable the Adopt-A-Ship Program is to teachers and our youth. It is really a very worthwhile effort that should be much more widespread. Information about the program can be found on the MARAD website at http://www.marad.dot.gov/education/adopt_a_ship/, or contact Sharon LeGrand at sharon.legrand@dot.gov.



Betty Coerber, Evans Elementary School in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, receiving an award from Capt. Jim Robinson on behalf of The Propeller Club of the United States for her extensive efforts in promoting the Adopt-a-Ship Program at Evans for the past 29 years.